



# Things Will Get Better Before They Get Worse

*Bernard Lonergan's philosophy of history*

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FEBRUARY 2026

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Bernard Lonergan's concept of "individual bias," according to Jonathan Heaps, occurs when "members of the community only ask questions, accept ideas, or pursue actions that pertain to their individual advantage." How might individual bias be identified in practice, given that it often appears as "common sense" rather than overt self-interest?

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2. Heaps suggests that Lonergan had the Catholic Church's antimodernism in mind when he described "group bias." How do you understand group bias as it has appeared within the Church? In what ways is it similar to or different from the group bias Heaps attributes to the Trump-led Republican Party? Do you see reciprocal influences at play between the Church and American politics?

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3. According to Heaps, Lonergan believes that "all evil is stupid—and the more evil, the more stupid in direct proportion." Do you agree with this claim? How might we interpret Lonergan's understanding of evil in light of his early twentieth-century context, having lived through the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini?

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4. Lonergan views the "longer cycle" of cultural and spiritual decline as an almost inevitable psychological consequence of the "shorter cycle" of crisis and recovery. Beyond the psychological pressures of repeated crises, what are other forces that contribute to the rise of a general bias toward practicality? Do your own experiences resonate with Lonergan's definitions of the longer and shorter cycles?

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5. Heaps maps the current momentum of the Democratic Party onto Lonergan's account of recovery in the shorter cycle. Do you agree with his mapping? What cycle do you think we are in?

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6. Heaps says that "the gift of God's unlimited love can, by extension, manifest in an experience of unrestricted willingness—that is, in perfected freedom." In light of this, how might the Catholic Church serve as a corrective force against long-term decline by making this redemptive power more visible and tangible?

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7. If decline begins with a loss of curiosity and a failure to ask questions, what questions do we most need to recover, personally or as a community?

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Matt McManus, "Big Ideas, No Scruples," February 2026: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/big-ideas-no-scruples>

George Scialabba, "Spellbound," February 2026: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/spellbound>

Lisa Sowle Cahill, "The Primacy of Politics," December 2025: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/primacy-politics-1>

William T. Cavanaugh, "No Kings but Jesus," November 19, 2025: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/william-cavanaugh-no-kings-christ-trump-mussolini>